

A MESSAGE FROM . . .



BOB RILEY
Governor, State of Alabama

Alabama farmers, forest landowners, and small rural producers are some of the most productive in the world. Farm and forest products grown by Alabamians help to feed, clothe, and shelter thousands of people both inside and outside our state boundaries.

A new program is available to rural producers of all venues and sizes to help improve their economic incomes as well as help increase tourism dollars for the entire state. Alabama's Agri-Tourism Trail is a partnership between the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel, the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, and the Alabama Farmers Federation to promote the state's rural producers and their products to tourists from around the country.

Currently over 70 rural producers and businesses are participating in the program including u-pick operations, produce stands, pumpkin patches, nurseries, TREASURE Forests, hunting opportunities, riding trails, farm bed and breakfasts, and agricultural historical sites. Specific information about the products and services these rural farmers and businesses provide is available on the Trail's web site (www.alabamaagritourism.com) where tourists

nationally and internationally can see what fresh produce, product, or agri-tourism experience is available during their stay in or their trip through Alabama.

Although this program will bring many benefits to our rural farmers, landowners, and entrepreneurs, one of the greatest benefits to visitors will be the exposure to the beautiful rural areas of our state and our exceptional quality of life. The Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail will showcase the heartbeat of our state – our farms, forests, and rural businesses. ☸



TIMOTHY C. BOYCE
State Forester

Every summer the media turns our attention to the western region of the United States as raging wildfires burn across the land. We watch as fires consume acres and acres of trees and in many cases, homes and other structures. We shake our heads and say we're glad things such as that don't happen in Alabama.

What they never tell you is that the 13 southern states lead the nation in the number of wildfires, averaging about 45,000 fires each year, and many areas of Alabama have the potential for the catastrophic fires that we see out west.

With our state's population increasing each year, more and more homes are being built in forested areas or in the interface where the urban area and wildlands meet. With this rapid increase in urbanization, the potential for loss of life and property increases with each structure that is built.

According to a newly released publication, *Fire in the South: A Report by the Southern Group of State Foresters*, the status and characteristics of the wildland fire problem in the southern states are changing. The growing fire problem, combined with decreasing state capacity, is providing an environment for problems in the future.

Some of the key findings of the *Fire in the South* report include:

- State agencies are responsible for wildland fire suppression on 94% of the South's 214 million acres of land. The greatest portion of this land is owned by private landowners.
- The 13 southern states produce 65% (almost two-thirds) of the nation's wood fiber. Forest industries in the south employ more than 2.2 million workers and they contribute over \$251 billion to the southern economy each year.
- The South is one of the fastest growing regions in the nation. In 2001 we were home to seven of the nation's ten fastest growing counties.
- Because of changing demographics, traditional firefighting tactics such as prescribed fire and plowed fire breaks are more difficult to employ. With the increasing wildland/urban interface, structural losses and loss of life from wildfire will be a greater risk.

This report, along with the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment that will be released soon, provides state agencies with valuable information that will assist them in working with counties, cities, and communities in prioritizing and planning in order to provide the best fire protection service that we can with the resources that we have available. Hopefully, we will be able to reduce the potential and severity of wildfires, thus providing a safer environment to work in and raise our families. ☸